Some Questions and Answers About Project Management and Project Documentation: A White Paper

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Introduction: Similar but different!

Projects are increasingly the way of life in the business world. Increasingly that means projects start to look like one another and work products from prior project efforts can be leveraged on future efforts. Call it the 'cheat to win' strategy! But how do you know this? *Through the meticulous record keeping of both project management related documents and the work product related documents produced throughout the life of the project!*

The second reason why meticulous record keeping benefits the project manager is as a part of their overall *risk mitigation strategy*. Requirements, budgets, deadlines, sponsorship and the political climate are all subject to change. But how do you protect yourself as a project manager from being browbeaten at every turn, over every adverse course of events throughout the life of project? By formalizing change and by subjecting all changes to a controlled, documented, deliberate and formally approved process.

This white paper discusses how even the project manager who has neither a big budget or access to a formal project management lifecycle methodology can instill a reasonable degree of control over project management related documentation.

I've heard project management is something done only during the "start-up" or initiation of a project. Is this true?

Project management isn't simply creating a project plan, having a meeting to distribute the plan (i.e. assigning the work and due dates) and reconvening at a future date, when presumably the project is completed – It simply doesn't work this way, at least not successfully, and certainly not for anything but the smallest of projects. Project management is all about *actively managing the project throughout its' life cycle* and all risks that might derail a project along the way.

While the efforts needed to manage (and document) a project will typically be greater in its earliest stages, there are ongoing activities that will continue to require active project management (and documentation) until the project is completed. For instance, making use of interim deliverables, milestones, checkpoint reviews and status meetings are all attributes of active project management. Emanating from such activities is a wide range of project related documentation, which is discussed within this paper.

Isn't documenting a project itself a form of Project Management?

Don't fall into a trap of believing that project management is largely an administrative task intended at documenting the project. Completing project documentation, even on an ongoing basis throughout the life of a project, does not itself constitute project management – it's mere a by-product of such! While it is desirable to preserve or chronicle the project for future reference, make no mistake, efforts to document the project should not be construed as "fulfilling your commitment to project management". Instead, one should view documentation simply as *"evidence of active project management".*

Why is project work documented?

It is desirable to preserve or chronicle the project for future reference for several reasons. First, we document projects because when the project is completed, we presumably have implemented a working system that will evolve and change over time. Given the average life of a system installed today exceeds seven years, it's a safe assumption there will be future changes. Likewise, the employee groups that use

and service a system will evolve and change over time. Thus, a good project history in the form of strong project documentation helps to ease the burden of future maintenance, transition and support.

Second, good project documentation, particularly metric-related information, such as budgets, estimates, schedules and ultimately, the size of the finished product, can be invaluable in estimating future project work of a similar nature. The potential value that past project documentation can help in future project estimation also points out the need to maintain baseline budgets and schedules, any subsequent revisions to each, and more importantly the need to track and record actual figures against planned or budgeted figures.

What types of documentation should a project have?

Typically, there are two categories or types of project documentation "produced" or "delivered" during a typical project. Both types of documentation are a necessary and integral part of any project. Documentation is prepared at various intervals over the lifecycle of a project. The first category of documentation is referred to as **project deliverables** or **work products,** while the second category of documentation is referred to as **project management deliverables**.

Project Deliverables

The first type of documentation can be referred to as **project deliverables** or **work products.** Examples include requirements documents, design documents, testing plans, migration plans and end user related procedural and training manuals.

Project Management Deliverables

The second type of documentation can be referred to as **project management deliverables**. These documents are best thought of as by-products of active project management. These project management documents will be produced throughout the life of a project. Generally standards apply as to what documents are to be produced and in what format.

There are four general classifications or categories of project management documentation deliverables.

First, there are **project initiation documents**, such as project requests, charters, approvals or briefs, project team directories and organizational charts, baseline budgets and schedules. Declarations regarding standards and formats for project lifecycle documentation are typically made as well.

Second, there are **project lifecycle documents**, including updated budgets, schedules, timesheets, meeting agendas, steering committee and project team meeting minutes, meeting agendas, issue logs, change requests.

Project specific documentation guidelines, recommendations and standards constitute a third category of project management documentation deliverable referred to as **work product standards.**

Project closing documents, such as acceptance documents, satisfaction surveys, post mortem review notes, represents the last category of project management documentation.

When should a project be documented?

Project management documentation evolves and accumulates over the life of a project as a natural by-product of the project management process. At the conclusion of a project it is desirable to gather all deliverables (project management and work product deliverables) into a project notebook. Nowadays, its' also a good idea to burn several CDs containing all project related deliverables on it.

As for project work product documentation deliverables or work products, they are represented by specific due dates or milestones that can occur at any time, throughout the life of project.

Don't deliverables change frequently? How can they ever be an accurate reflection of a project's status?

Project management deliverables change daily and weekly. They are by definition, snapshots taken at any given point in time over the course of a project, such as a weekly timesheet or status report. They won't always be right, but they should get done. These documents serve as interim working documents and are used as the basis for discussion and will serve as a means for making revisions to the project itself. As such they don't need to be exhibit perfection, but need to be reasonably correct in their statement of the facts or condition of the project on an overall basis or as to specific tasks.

For consulting work, project management deliverables are held to a higher standard. They in fact must exhibit greater accuracy as clients are typically billed for services rendered based upon these daily or weekly documents.

Documentation always seems to be changing. How can it be controlled?

Project Management Documentation and Project Related Work Products can and will change frequently throughout the life of a project. Version control is essential to maintain and preserve the integrity of project deliverables (work products). Given the longer file names now available in today's computer environments, this should be a relatively easy task. Even rudimentary controls will suffice, such as incremental version numbers as noted below:

> Deliverable – Software Architecture Plan – Version 0100
> Deliverable – Software Architecture Plan – Version 0101
> Work Product – Software Architecture Plan – Version 0100
> Work Product – Software Architecture Plan – Version 0101

Note this example uses the term "work product" (terms should as working paper or draft could also be used) for an interim deliverable and the term "deliverable" for any "final" deliverable.
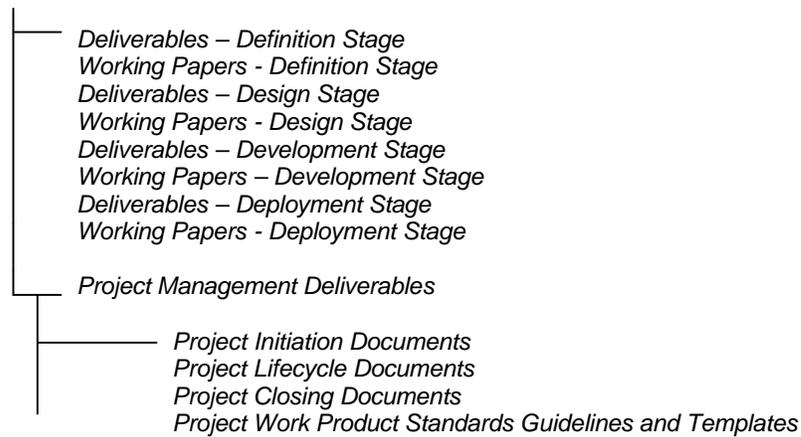
> Project Plan – XYZ Project – Update As of MM-DD-YYYY
> Project Plan – XYZ Project – Baseline Version 0100
> Status Report – XYZ Project – As Of MM-DD-YYYY

Project management reports are typically considered snapshot documents as of a given date, thus the reason for dated versions of most documents. Baseline documents are numbered.

There is a need to acquire and collaborate on documents within a project team. How can this be done?

Shared folders on a network attached disk drive (i.e. an Intranet) works well for this purpose. One such technique is to establish a folder for project, then within the project folder establish additional folders for work products or deliverables related to each major phase of the project and also create folders for Project Management documents here as well. In effect you're built an online version of a project notebook. This makes it easy to burn a CD-ROM of these folders for archival, backup, or to transporting project related documents to remote locations.

Team Folder – XYZ Project

- *Deliverables – Definition Stage*
- *Working Papers - Definition Stage*
- *Deliverables – Design Stage*
- *Working Papers - Design Stage*
- *Deliverables – Development Stage*
- *Working Papers – Development Stage*
- *Deliverables – Deployment Stage*
- *Working Papers - Deployment Stage*

Project Management Deliverables

- *Project Initiation Documents*
- *Project Lifecycle Documents*
- *Project Closing Documents*
- *Project Work Product Standards Guidelines and Templates*

The next section of this white paper covers more advanced techniques of document control.

Formalized Document Control and Distribution: The Next Step

More formal techniques exist for the control, distribution and maintenance of project related documentation. For instance, for IT specific projects, many source code change control systems can maintain control over the types of documents typically produced during the software development lifecycle.

For other types of business-oriented projects, or for software package selection and implementation projects where IT-related change control resources may not be available, there are several good options available, including IDEA!, a low cost document organizing tool from Sycon (www.sycon.de) of Germany. For more rigorous document control, there is a tool called SBS from PROQUIS in England, whose customers include commercial airplane manufacturer, Airbus (www.proquis.com).

These tools typically work on the basis of controlled access to a shared folder. A new document is placed into the controlled access shared folder by a 'check-in' process. When an authorized project team member wishes to edit or otherwise maintain the document, the document is 'checked out' to that individual on an exclusive basis.

Note that Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems and Product Data Management (PDM) systems often include Engineering Change Notification (ECN) documentation workflows and processes that can provide similar functions.

Epilogue

Project managers and project teams are successful when they work in a planned, deliberate and well-organized manner. *In conclusion, spending a few moments establishing document folders and naming conventions will help project managers and project teams work smarter, instead of harder.*

As for tools, you can use what you have, and if your budget allows, you can invest in more formalized tools to control all project management and work product related document deliverables at a more granular level.

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About the Author

Robert W. Starinsky is the Principal and Owner of Tradewinds Group, Incorporated. Prior to organizing Tradewinds Group, Bob was a Practice Manager and Management Consultant with New Resources Corporation. Bob gained extensive industry experience before venturing into consulting work. He has practical work experience in manufacturing, distribution, and financial services and has held numerous managerial and professional positions in financial operations, information systems, product management and in materials management.

Over the course of his career, Bob has held key delivery leadership positions on numerous projects that have been directly related to the selection and implementation of packaged software solutions.

His experience includes knowledge of Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP), Customer Relationship Management (CRM), Computerized Plant Maintenance Management (CMMS), Supply Chain Management (SCM), Professional Services Automation (PSA) and various other software packages related to financial operations and management. He has worked with the products of many vendors, including those offered by Best Programs, J. D. Edwards, Great Plains, P.S.D.I., SAP and Siebel Systems.

Bob earned his Undergraduate degree at Northwestern University and holds Masters degrees from DePaul University and from Dominican University and is a certified computing professional (CCP). Bob is the author of Implementing J. D. Edwards OneWorld (Published in the Spring of 2001 by Prima Tech) and Maximizing Business Performance through Software Packages: Best Practices for Justification, Selection and Implementation (2003, Auerbach/CRC Press).

Tradewinds Group, Incorporated is a management consulting firm serving organizations of all types and sizes throughout the United States, providing both general business and technology-focused services including business process re-engineering, change management, custom documentation and training, packaged software selection and implementation (CRM, ERP, SCM, e-business), process and systems auditing and project management, including assistance with project management standards and project document control techniques and practices.